

Dr. Asha Pillai Appointed to NIH Study Section

Asha B. Pillai, M.D., a Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center researcher and deputy director of translational research and training in the Department of Pediatrics at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine, has been named to the Transplantation, Tolerance and Tumor Immunology Study Section of the Center for Scientific Review at the National Institutes of Health.

Study sections review biomedical research grant applications submitted to the NIH, make recommendations to the appropriate national advisory council or board, and survey the status of research in their fields. Members are selected on the basis of their achievement in their scientific discipline as evidenced by the quality of research accomplishments, publications in scientific journals, and other significant scientific activities and honors.



Dr. Asha B. Pillai

Dr. Pillai, associate professor of pediatrics, microbiology and immunology, is nationally recognized for her expertise in innate immune regulation, pediatric stem cell transplantation, and immunotherapy. She is director of the FOCIS Center of Excellence in Human Immunology at the Miller School of Medicine.

“We are thrilled that Dr. Pillai’s distinguished research has been recognized by this appointment to an NIH study section,” said Carl I. Schulman, M.D., Ph.D., M.S.P.H., executive dean for research. “She has an extraordinary opportunity to help guide the future of biomedical research, and I know her contributions will be significant.”

Dr. Pillai’s research has innovated understandings of the role of innate immunity in establishing transplantation tolerance across histocompatibility barriers and the maintenance of anti-tumor activity after hematopoietic stem cell transplant

(HSCT). Key findings from her group have been successfully applied translationally to design novel clinical trials of reduced toxicity HSCT for older adults with advanced malignancies, and in children for parent-to-child curative stem cell transplants for both pediatric leukemias and non-malignant disorders such as immune deficiencies, aplastic anemia, thalassemia, and sickle cell disease.

Her group has also established robust mouse models of histocompatibility-mismatched HSCT in many disease models which are defining the specific immune parameters required for establishment of stem cell transplant and solid organ transplant tolerance. Parallel to these studies, the group has pioneered novel immune therapies using targeted innate lymphocyte populations that have significant advantages compared with conventional immunotherapies, work that they are advancing at Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center in collaboration with other groups in the Tumor Biology Program.

“I recognize the significant responsibility of NIH peer review and am honored to represent Sylvester, the Miller School of Medicine, and the departments of Pediatrics and Microbiology and Immunology at the NIH Center for Scientific Review,” Dr. Pillai said. “Having been supported by NIH funding since I was a post-doctoral research fellow, I value the central role of NIH peer review in shaping not only the intellectual content of the research enterprise in our field, but also the maintenance of a diverse and robust scientific workforce. I look forward to working with my colleagues to ensure continued rigor in both aspects through service on the NIH Center for Scientific Review.”

The Transplantation, Tolerance and Tumor Immunology Study Section reviews applications involving the making and breaking of immune tolerance, cancer immunity, and immunotherapy. The areas of focus include human and animal studies of transplantation immunology, mechanisms of acquired immune tolerance, tumor immunology and early-stage development of immune therapies and tumor vaccines.